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ABSTRACT

The literature on using music to teach reading was reviewed, revealing that the majority of articles published on the topic were testimonials of instructional music program effects on language reading skills attainment. Discussion articles primarily cited individual experiences in using music, often singing, to aid in the acquisition of reading skills. The articles that were not based on research frequently mentioned positive affective results from a music/reading approach. The research articles were divided into those investigating the commonalities of music reading and language reading, and those investigating the effect of particular music instruction programs on reading achievement. The research results seemed to indicate that there were positive relationships between factors in music ability (musicality) and language reading ability, but that correlations ranged from low positive to high levels of significance. Studies of the effect of music instruction on reading skill acquisition had mixed results, some indicating that music instruction may have enhanced auditory discrimination skills. Apparently some music programs have a facilitative effect on reading performance through their development of listening skills and attention span. (Author/RL)

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USING MUSIC TO TEACH READING:

State of the Art Review

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In recent years professional journals have evidenced an increased number of articles concerning the utilization of music in teaching language reading. Specialists in both reading and music education have begun to investigate the relationships between these two disciplines. The purpose of this paper is to review the literature of using music to teach language reading and to discuss the implications of research findings for teachers of reading and music.

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Non-research Articles

The majority of articles published about using music to teach reading are testimonials discussing the effect of an instructional music program on language reading skill attainment. Advocates of music to teach reading position claim positive affective and cognitive results from combining music instruction with reading. Primarily the music to teach reading enthusiasts utilize song lyrics and titles as the materials for teaching reading (Earle & Perney, 1972; Hayes and Smith, 1975; Johnson, 1976; Larrick, 1971). Often the music/reading materials are used to motivate participation by slow learners or remedial reading students (Gibbs, 1970; Moyer, 1975; Newsom, 1979; Wulffson, 1970). Other proponents of music to teach reading cite the linguistic benefits for students learning English as a second language (Richards, 1975). Early childhood educators also credit music to teach reading with improving listening skills and attention span, expanding vocabulary increasing context meaning, and developing visual skills (Cohen, 1974; Kuhmerker, 1969; Lloyd, 1978; McDonald, 1975; Rietz, 1976; Schneider, 1969). Authors of discussion articles often cite personal experiences but rarely offer research findings to support their positions favoring the music/reading approach. While cognitive and affective benefits may be derived from the music/reading approach, it is not possible to calculate the effect of teacher-experimenter bias or Hawthorne effect on skill acquisition.

Research Studies

Research studies of music to teach language reading encompass a broader perspective than merely utilization of song materials. The research studies of music/reading can be categorized into a) investigations of relationships between language reading ability and musicality or music reading ability and, b) studies of the effect of music program instruction on reading skill acquisition.

Relationship between Music and Language Reading

Initial music/reading research was based on the premise that similar skills are required for both the music reading and language reading processes. Monroe (1967) and Maze (1967) both conducted studies of music/reading common factors. Monroe studied the aspects of teaching language reading and music reading which might result in greater insight into the music reading process. According to Monroe there are parallels between principles and procedures of teaching music reading and other disciplines such as language reading. Monroe's assumption of commonality between the areas is based on examination of the literature of related disciplines rather than experimental research. Maze investigated the relationship between native musicality ability (pitch and timbre discrimination, rhythm sense, and tonal memory) and reading acievement of first graders. Research results showed significant correlations between musicality sub tests and reading achievement.

Wheeler and Wheeler (1952) also conducted investigations of music/reading factors. Wheeler and Wheeler found low positive correlations between language reading and music reading factors with higher correlations between music and intelligence or reading ability and intelligence.

A more recent study by Parker (1969-70) investigated the relationship between musical perception (pitch discrimination and memory for tunes and rhythms) and reading ability of backward readers. Parker concluded that musical perception and language reading ability are not related, but that the reading process may be slowed by the lack of adequate rhythmic perception.

Ruth Zinar in an article entitled "Reading Language and Reading Music: Is There a Connection?" in Music Educators Journal, March, 1976, reviewed the research of several early studies concerned with music/reading relationships. Of those studies reviewed by Zinar, only an investigation by Hutton (1953) demonstrated little correlation between language reading and music reading ability. In the Hutton study, however, pre-existing language reading test scores were compared with music reading test results following music instruction. Based on the studies reviewed, Zinar concluded that research correlations found between language reading and musicality test results ranged from low positive to high levels of significance. There is no reason to dispute Zinar's findings of correlation. However, the common factor of language reading ability and music reading ability may well be intelligence as

suggested by Wheeler and Wheeler.

Music as a Nonverbal Prototype

An assumption of most early researchers was that commonalities did exist between the learning of music reading and language reading. Berman (1976), recognizing the growing evidence of the importance of nonverbal auditory and visual information processing skills in reading skill attainment, investigated the use of music as a nonverbal reading prototype to study auditory-visual processing of good and poor readers. In developing the reading prototype, Tonal Reading, Berman analyzed and compared the structures of reading and music reading systems. The reading prototype, Tonal Reading, "was designed to initially teach auditory skills of sound recognition, discrimination, recall and reproduction; and then to introduce A-V tasks of pairing sounds to visual symbols; with the final tasks being the decoding or translating of the correct sound (musical) from the appropriate corresponding visual symbol (noteme)," (Berman, 1976, p.99). Research results indicated that poor readers may experience a particular pattern to the A-V processing difficulties. Berman concluded that music programs could assist in achievement of reading skill acquisition and in the identification of disabled readers. However, Berman's Tonal Reading program was specially designed to teach A-V tasks and was not a typical public school music instruction program. Considerable revision of the Tonal Reading program would be required if it were to be generally used to aid acquisition of reading skills or diagnosis of disabled readers.

Effect of Music Instruction on Reading

A number of investigators have conducted studies of the effect of music instruction on reading skill acquisition. These studies include those with remedial readers, preschoolers, and primary grade children. Roskam (1977) and Wohl (1971) both conducted studies with children who had learning problems. In the Roskam study 36 children diagnosed as learning disabled were divided into three treatment groups of language development, music therapy, and a combination treatment. After a three month treatment period no statistically significant differences in gain scores for the three groups on auditory discrimination and reading skills test results were found. The Wohl study attempted to use music education to improve reading achievement of failure-bound students. Students with lowest reading scores tended to drop out or absent themselves from the study. Reading achievement did not improve for subjects, but problems in research design were contributing factors.

Hurwitz, et al. (1975), Smith (1978), Turnipseed, et al. (1974), and Lauder (1976) all reported studies on the effect of music instruction on reading skill acquisition. Hurwitz identified non-musical effects of the Kodaly Music Program as causing a facilitative effect on reading performance. The Smith, Turnipseed and Lauder studies each used different instructional music programs to develop auditory discrimination skills. Improvements in auditory discrimination were noted in both the Smith and Turnipseed studies.

Studies of the effect of music instruction on language reading skill acquisition do not support the use of music instruction as the method of improving reading achievement. However, the studies involving music instruction did not attempt to use song materials as the reading material, but attempted to use music reading as a facilitator of language reading improvement. Although common processes are observed in both types of reading apparently the differences in skill requirements out weigh similarities.

Summary

In conclusion, current research findings do not support the use of music instruction for purposes of improving language reading attainment. There does appear to be a positive correlation between factors of musical ability and language reading ability. Not measured by the research studies reviewed were questions related to affective effect of using music to teach reading. Although discussion articles cite positive motivation from the music/reading approach, researchers did not measure attitudinal effect. The Wohl study did discuss this aspect and several writers did mention motivation or increased attention span as an effect from music/reading (Wagley, 1978).

Based on a review of all of the music/reading articles, it would appear that if one likes the music/reading approach, that is using songs in teaching reading skills, it can be successfully utilized as a part of the instructional program for reading. The affective aspects of effect of music

instruction on reading achievement and the use of song material as reading content have not yet been sufficiently investigated. This author is currently researching the use of song charts with rebus insertions in the teaching of prereading and beginning reading skills. Both motivational and reading skill acquisition factors are being investigated. Future researchers may find that an interdisciplinary approach to reading benefits children who depend heavily on the auditory modality for learning.

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